# WINNING OUT

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BY

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THE European war continues to hold the attention of the world; the question as to which side is going to win out is one in which everybody takes an intense interest. For the nations engaged in the struggle, this question is felt to be one which involves their very existence—for them it is the only thing worth thinking about. Therefore, all thought of the day is not only colored but largely determined by the war.

Literature has become war litera-

ture; political and economic questions are discussed with direct reference to the war; poetry, music, art, religion,—in fact, every subject of human interest is adjusted to-day to meet the conditions of a world set in conflict.

War books have reached such an enormous volume that public appetite is at last sated, and publishers say the demand for them is on the wane. The public mind, at first dazed by the gigantic horror of it all, is now taking second thought and everywhere this calm second thought is expressed in such questions as—

"When will it end?"

"Who will be victor?"

"What will be the result for modern civilization?"

For the nations engaged in the conflict there is then one question and only one that matters,—"Are we winning out?"

Battles may be lost or won, territory may be taken or surrendered, nations may be obliterated and new kingdoms made, but "Are we winning the war?"—that is the supreme issue—indeed, the only issue.

Now it is not my purpose here to discuss this subject at all; I have raised the question in regard to the war only to set forth its supremacy

and immediately to transfer it to another field. What remains to be said in these pages will, it is hoped, be of interest and help to Christian men and women, members of the Christian church who in these days must often have deep searchings of heart and many an anxious thought about the past achievements, the present situation, and the future outlook of the greatest institution known to man—the Church of Jesus Christ.

For them the issue is vital, the question is as urgent and insistent, as it is in the warring world from which it has been transferred. That we may approach our discussion with

some hope of satisfying results, it is necessary first to get some *clear and compact idea of what the Christian church from the beginning was expected to accomplish,* just as we must judge of the success or failure of warring nations in proportion to the degree in which they accomplish the objects for which they went to war. If these aims are being achieved, they are winning out; if not, they are failing.

It is true, of course, in both secular and religious warfare, that in the long drawn-out course of the struggle both victories and defeats accrue which were not foreseen. These

must always be adjudged as subsidiary to the one great aim in view.

When our Lord first proclaimed "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," what did He mean? What was His conception of the nature of that kingdom? What did He expect the kingdom to accomplish? Has the course of Christianity in the world corresponded to the program that Christ had in mind, or has it been a disappointment and a failure; or, even if not a total failure, has it been something wholly different from our Lord's anticipations?

Having determined, as far as possible, what Jesus expected and hoped

the kingdom would achieve, our next question is, how far the Christian Church is realizing the hopes of Jesus. Is it the moral and spiritual world-force He hoped it would be?

Finally, let us consider an intimately related question—the influence of Christianity upon the individual.

# I

FIRST of all, then, what was our Lord's idea about His kingdom? Did He look for its immediate success? Did He think that multitudes would crowd into it and that only the hopeless few would be left out? When He saw eager men and women thronging about Him and hanging upon his every word, did He imagine that they were to become His disciples, would enter into actual loving fellowship with Him as did the small group of "The

Twelve"? And further, through these disciples' efforts did He expect the remainder of His fellow-countrymen to be convinced and to come into the kingdom and that through them in turn other nations would come, and soon all the kingdoms of the world would become His kingdom?

For answer to our inquiry we must study our Lord's own words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. vii, 13, 14, etc.). There is a passage which seems to be a simple and direct answer to our question: "Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many

there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it."

Our past over-emphasis on the future life has led the average New Testament reader to interpret this passage as referring wholly to the disposal of men's destinies beyond the grave,—the truly awful impression left on the mind being that only a few are to find salvation hereafter, while the great majority are to be overwhelmed in destruction too terrible to contemplate. But are we shut up to this view of the passage? Surely not. It is not apparent that our Lord

is here discussing the final destiny of man; what He is speaking of is "the way that leadeth unto *life*."

It is the first passage in which the word "life" appears as summing up all the blessedness of the kingdom. Life, in its highest sense, is *the true and perfect knowledge of God and Christ* (John xvii, 2, 3.). Such knowledge is attained only by the few.

This ought not to surprise us for we see it everywhere else. If, for instance, you wish to enter into the life of a thinker, you will find that there is a strait gate and a narrow way, and few there be that find it.

One of his disciples makes Socrates say these words:

"Seest thou not a small door and a pathway before the door in no way crowded, but few, very few, go in thereat; this is the way that leadeth to true discipline."

When our Lord was upon this earth, it was only the few that heard and understood His message and entered fully into the more abundant life which He brought to men. It has been so in the history of the Church ever since, and it is strikingly the case to-day.

People for the most part are wholly unconscious of the greatness

of their own lives and the wonderful possibilities of them; the masses still prefer the cheap movie to the artists' masterpiece; they read the shallow novel and neglect the real maker of literature; they applaud the clown and ignore the actor, all of which, no doubt, is saddening to the thoughtful and superior few; but it ought not to lead any to despair. After all, the majority of people are like children in the marketplace, as our Lord so fittingly said; they are only children, especially in the things of the spirit. This, however, is far from saying that these thoughtless children are all eternally lost and

beyond the pale of hope. Our Lord never taught such a thing, and certainly we have no right to assume it. But what is going to become of this vast majority who are not finding the narrow gate that leads to life? "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat."

Here again the average New Testament reader gives to the word "destruction" the one interpretation to which he has become accustomed. He invariably thinks of it as applying wholly to the future state of suffering and misery. The truth is that it applies with greater fitness to con-

ditions in this world. The word properly translated really means annihilation, extinction, loss, or waste.

The "narrow gate" leads to life; that is, to life in its highest and fullest sense. The broad road leads to the opposite of life; that is, to extinction. We know that our Lord did not teach that immortal souls could become extinct; the better word, therefore, would be "loss" or "waste"; the waste of life, the loss of the things that make life really precious, the wretchedness of a wasted life. This is the destruction of which Jesus speaks.

Is it not true that only the very few

are making the best of their lives? The multitudes go their way and, from the point of view of the highest things, their lives are going to waste. They are, although, alas, unconscious of it, suffering untold loss. If only the waste of life could be stopped, what a revolution would be wrought everywhere! The sad fact is that it goes on every day before our very eyes,—waste of time—waste of energy—waste of health—waste of thought—waste, waste, waste, multitudes on the broad road that leads to waste and loss!

Did Jesus expect to stop this awful waste? Did He hope that during

the progress of His kingdom in the world these multitudes could be turned from the broad road to seek the narrow gate? Here, it seems to me, a twofold answer must be given.

In the first place, it is very doubtful that Jesus entertained the hope that every one would become His loyal disciple and enter into loving fellowship with Him. If He did, then after nineteen centuries how dreadfully that hope has been shattered! The truth is, that the masses of people, even in the most Christian countries to-day, are far from being devout and earnest followers of Christ. They are more bent upon

following their own pursuits and pleasures. This is undoubtedly the truth and we may as well frankly face it.

But a second and complementary answer to the question is that Jesus did most confidently believe that the Kingdom of God should be the saving and redeeming force in the life of humanity; preserving it from the utter waste and destruction upon which it is bent, and introducing mighty, subtle, life-giving forces and energies which keep it ever on the upward path that leads to life. However long and painful the path may be, there is the unconquerable

faith that it leads to the goal of a redeemed, exalted, and glorified humanity.

Our Lord said, "Ye are the salt of the earth"; meaning that His people were to preserve society and keep it from "going to the bad." He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven"; that is, that it should act in such a way as everywhere to make itself felt in the sweetening and elevation of human life.

Again, it is like a grain of mustard seed, or it is like a field where some of the land was hard, some stony, some choked with thorns, and only a portion of it good and fruit-

ful ground. Or, it was like another field where wheat and tares were growing together—but even where the tares had possession they were not to be torn up lest a few precious heads of the wheat be destroyed. Or, like a net which caught all kinds of fishes, both good and bad.

A careful study of the parables will, I think, correct the exaggerated and wrong notions that people have had about what Christ thought His kingdom was to be. He made all allowance for failures and partial successes, for the slow progress and the disappointing results which we so deplore. He did not expect the

world to be converted in a day or in a millennium.

In the light of His teachings we have to ask whether the church is winning out along the lines of His expectation. Is the church to-day the "salt of the earth," keeping life clean and sweet and saving it from corruption, or has the salt lost its preserving savor? Can it be said that Christianity, as we know it, is leavening human life and thought? Is it making its elevating power felt everywhere, or has society become so sodden that the leaven is without effect? Does the good seed of the kingdom still grow and flourish and

feed the famished, or has the ground become so hard, so stony, and so choked with thorns that there is no prospect of a harvest unto life eternal?

## II

Is the church to-day meeting the needs of the age? Here we are facing one of the most difficult, and at the same time one of the most important, questions that we can possibly ask. Let us imagine our question addressed to three classes of people, —those who are hostile to religion, those who are indifferent, and those who are deeply interested.

The answer of the first class would be an emphatic "No!" To these people religion is a dangerous super-

stition which, vampire-like, preys upon the ignorance and credulity of its helpless and pathetic victims, only to serve its own selfish ends. The church is not meeting the needs of the age, these critics savagely reply, because there is no such need as the church prates about. Man has no religious nature, no spiritual longings, no sense of sin, no hidden heart sorrow, no yearning for higher fellowship, no hunger for God, no longings for a higher or fuller life here and hereafter. All such things are but the rankest superstitions, craftily implanted and cunningly fostered by designing priests, who

live in ease and exert vast influence by means of them. The real needs of humanity, our hostile critics tell us, are abundant bread and butter, material comforts, and "a good time;" give these to the world and it wants no more.

Happily, such critics are now few in number. There was a time, a generation or so ago, when they were quite plentiful—strangely enough, it was at a time when our American churches were thronged with worshipers. People know better to-day, though large numbers still think that the chief needs of the world are material.

The modern socialist, who assumes no hostility to religion and even acknowledges religious needs as valid, is, nevertheless, very sure that the healing of our social disorders is the first necessity. No doubt the needs of the body and those of the soul are intimately connected. Jesus recognized this from the first, and it has always been recognized to some extent by the church, though, alas, the church has attempted to deal with material needs by means of crude and blundering methods. Like every human institution, the church has had to learn, and there are evidences on every hand to-day that she is learn-

ing the lesson of her responsibility for social conditions. Recognizing all that, however, the church is certain that man's material needs are not the only, nor even the first, consideration. She knows too well that multitudes of those who have every material blessing that heart can crave are among the most desolate and unhappy of human beings.

The answer of the indifferent masses—and their name is legion—to the question "Is the church meeting the needs of the age?" is an acted, and not a spoken, answer; for the truth is that the indifferent masses are not interested enough to make any spoken

answer. They are neither for the church nor against her; they simply are not interested. The dogma of endless torments in hell is no longer either preached or believed, and though at intervals there may be a sort of haunting dread as to what may be after death, it is not so acute as to drive the indifferent man to take any very active precautionary measures as to his soul.

His soul, if he has one, he thinks must take chances with the vast majority of his fellowmen, who, he sees, live very much as he does himself. True, even the indifferent man has his moments of illumination; ever

and again he is brought suddenly face to face with life's realities. Misfortune, sickness, and death come to his home too, and at such moments he reproaches himself bitterly for his religious indifference and neglect. But all that passes away and he is soon back again in the old ruts. It would seem that the answer of this class of persons is of no consequence, —and yet actions do speak.

The most indifferent persons resort to the church and to religion for comfort and help when sorrow and death are upon them. Even those who never go to church send for the minister when a child dies. They

themselves may live like heathen, but they want the child to have a Christian burial.

Then, too, the indifferent masses have their own ways of thinking. They have their ideas of right and wrong. Many of them are not indifferent upon great moral questions; they have a conscience; yes, they have a heart too, and often the most touching deeds of kindness are done by those who are religiously indifferent. And even on religious questions their dormant interest may, on occasion, be aroused. It is truly remarkable, for instance, to what a towering rage a Protestant, who never darkens his

own church door, may be aroused if his faith is attacked by a Roman Catholic. I have known a man to curse and swear outrageously in defending his religion against the attack of an atheist.

Another most remarkable phenomenon is, that these same people, indifferent about their own souls, are surprisingly concerned about the souls of others. I know many men of this class who urge their wives to attend church; I know many parents who never go to church themselves, yet they are at great pains to see that their children attend Sabbath School and church services regularly. All

of this goes to show that the dumb and inarticulate mass of the religiously indifferent acknowledge, by their actions at least, that there is a soul-need and that the church is in some way meeting that need.

Nor must it ever be forgotten that this class is never hopeless. Indeed, we are always getting fresh surprises from this quarter; indifference is, after all, a habit of mind with many people, for they are indifferent about other things as well; these are the people who would never think of taking the trouble to vote when election day arrives, but ever and again some issue arises sufficiently impor-

tant to arouse them, and then they go to the polls. And after the prognostications of all the political wiseacres have gone awry, we read that the silent vote did it. Just so! How often has it happened that when some great moral issue, like temperance reform, or the eradication of social evils, or political corruption, was to be decided, these silent voters have proved that they are, after all, a potential ally of whom the church ought to feel neither hopelessness nor despair.

But what is the answer of the church herself to the question under discussion? What does she honestly

think of herself? Here we are met with very marked and well-defined attitudes on the part of leaders and members and friends of the church.

Lying on my desk as I write is a little book, ably written by a Christian minister, entitled "The Church of To-day."[1] The attitude of the writer is one of severe though wholesome criticism. His view of the present situation of the church is, to say the least, gloomy and the gloom deepens along these lines:

1. There is a marked decrease in the supply of ministers. Ten years ago (the book was written in 1908)

[1] By Joseph Henry Crooker.

"the number of students in American divinity schools was 4000; ten years later it had fallen to 3300, whereas it ought to have advanced to 4500, had it kept pace with the growth of population."

2. The lack of popular interest in theological books is deplored as showing a falling off in interest in religion on the part of the general public.

3. The difficulty that church papers and religious periodicals have in maintaining themselves is another part of the cumulative argument.

4. The sensationalism of the modern pulpit is cited as "a striking

evidence of the decreasing hold of the church upon the world, too evident to need extended discussion."

5. Church attendance, it is said, has not kept pace with the growth of population in the country generally; and where it is keeping up it is due to the large influx of Roman Catholics, who are all said to be churchgoers.

6. During recent years, gifts and money to other humanitarian institutions are said to largely exceed those to the church, such institutions, for example, as libraries, hospitals, and various charitable institutions.

7. Still another evidence in the

same direction is the decline of the salaries paid to clergymen. There are some American country towns where the minister's salary is $600 per annum, while that of the high school principal in the same town is $1600.

8. Along the same line, the writer notes that the position of the minister, formerly one of respect and authority, has deteriorated into that of a "merely decorative figure," desirable at banquets, weddings, funerals, etc.

And so the damaging indictment proceeds along the line of the church's failure with labor leaders

and capitalists, its failure to influence the home life, to preserve the sanctity of the Sabbath, etc., etc.

The one rift in the cloud is the last sentence of a very arresting chapter which reads:

"It is well to see the dangers, but it is best to take means to rescue the church from its dangers and so win a victory for God and man."

Thank God, there is hope, though it is assuredly a disconcerting thought that a church, established in the world for the purpose of rescuing the lost, is herself in such desperate need of rescue. Still, even a sinking life-boat has been bailed out by its occu-

pants and both boat and occupants have been saved.

Side by side with the book from which I have just quoted, there lies another small volume, also ably written, entitled "The Call of the World," [1] published only a year or so later, in which quite another series of facts are set forth. As this writer sees it, there is an awakening—social, political, commercial, educational, religious—such as the world never, never saw before. In every case the forces and agencies which brought this marvelous awakening about have come from Christian lands. Most

[1] By W. E. Doughty.

potent of all these forces is the Christian missionary who has gone to the ends of the earth, taking with him not only the message of salvation, but also the finest ideals of western civilization.

Quoting from Professor Ross's "The Changing Chinese," the writer proceeds:

"The next ten years will, in all probability, constitute a turning-point in human history and may be of more critical importance in determining the spiritual evolution of mankind, than many centuries of ordinary experience. If those years are wasted, havoc may be wrought

that centuries will not be able to repair. On the other hand, if they are rightly used, they may be among the most glorious in human history."

These prophetic words were written before the outbreak of the European war and already we have seen that the turning-point in human history was reached in much less than the ten years predicted.

Another world-fact of vast significance to this writer is the increase in population in the Christian countries. During the past century the population of the United States and Canada has increased from 5,000,000 to 110,000,000. In the same period

the population of Europe has increased from 170,000,000 to 450,000,000, while during the same hundred years the population of non-Christian countries has in some cases declined, in others remained stationary, and at best has made only insignificant increases.

Again, it is pointed out that while three hundred years ago only seven per cent of the world's territory was controlled by Christian nations, to-day eighty-two per cent of it is so controlled. One hundred years ago there were only about a dozen missionary societies in the whole world, while to-day there are a thousand.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, we are told, there was only a handful of missionaries in the non-Christian world, and not one representative of the churches of North America, while to-day there are more than 22,000 missionaries.

The following figures are given for the student volunteer movement alone:

"The number of student volunteers that sailed:

1898–1902 ..... 780
1902–1906 ..... 1000
1906–1910 ..... 1286

"In the year 1911 alone the total

reached was 410, indicating the fact that the goal of 2000 sailed volunteers for the period of forty years is not too much to expect. One hundred years ago the gifts for missions of the whole Christian church were only $100,000 annually, while to-day the amount contributed exceeds $30,000,000."

Another interesting statement is made of the progress of the Kingdom of God, by centuries. At the end of the second century there were 2,000,000 Christians; at the end of the tenth, 50,000,000; the fifteenth, 100,000,000; the eighteenth, 200,000,000; the nineteenth, 500,000,000. Ad-

verting to what the writer calls "recent victories" we read:

"Looking at America first, we discover that 100 years ago there were 364,872 communicant members of the Protestant churches, out of a population of 5,305,925, or, one in fourteen. To-day one in four of the population is identified with the Protestant church. One hundred years ago only one in ten of the college students in America was a communicant member of the church, to-day practically every other college student is a member of some church. It is certainly encouraging that 50 per cent of that small fraction of our population,

which will furnish an enormous percentage of the leaders, are church members to-day, or five times as large a proportion as 100 years ago."

I close these two books and place them side by side on the shelf and find myself thinking earnestly over their contents and asking which is true. The answer that comes is that both are true, and the truth which each contains ought ever to be kept in the Christian's view. No doubt the church has made grave mistakes, has been guilty of much inefficiency, has been selfish and lethargic and behind the times, has failed lamentably to exercise anything like the full

force of her vast actual and potential powers for the advance of the kingdom. Yet, after all, it is her successes and not her failures that are impressive; on the whole, it is not the paralyzing fear of defeat, but the thrill of victory that comes to any one who will be at pains to take a calm and dispassionate view of the whole situation as it confronts us to-day.

In relief of fear, let all earnest souls, distressed at the present outlook, remember that present conditions are not new. The church has always been on the brink of a chasm; she has always been face to face with a crisis. To the outsider it has ever

appeared that her very existence was at stake and her collapse but a matter of time. Strangely enough, the very things that cause alarm to-day have existed from the beginning. The thing that distresses most people now is the lack of attendance on Christian worship; the worldly and non-Christian spirit that seems so evident within the church, and the deadening indifference both within the church and in the world outside.

Attendance at public worship is, after all, but a superficial standard by which to judge of the real life and power of the church. Yet it is a standard, though Isaiah warns the

people of his time that it is vain to crowd the courts of God's temple and to perform religious duties scrupulously, while these very devotees fail in true and just and merciful conduct which God requires. The Scribes and Pharisees were punctilious to a degree in the performance of religious offices, but they neglected the weightier matters of the law. We are inclined to look back with wistful longing to that early New Testament church and pray for the return of those glorious days that are gone. Yet, even then the people were apparently lazy about going to church, indeed some of them had

stopped altogether, hence the New Testament admonition not "to forsake the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is."

Yes, but was not the life of that apostolic church one of purity compared with ours? There were, undoubtedly, many cases of consecrated and exalted lives that we would do well to imitate, but on the other hand there were, even in those good old days, strifes, bitter janglings and stupid debates, dangerous heresies, and even gross immoralities. At Corinth we know some members had to be sharply rebuked for becoming

drunk at the communion table. Even that glorious teacher of the early Christian church, Chrysostom, the "golden mouthed" as he was called, for the marvelous effects of his oratory, complained bitterly that while the people thronged the market and the games, the house of God was well-nigh deserted. It is a fact that to-day, as of yore, even good and great Christians are at times seized with panic and pessimism, like the greatest of Hebrew prophets who wailed, "I only am left and they seek my life to take it away," whereas, with things as bad as they then were, still 7000 men had not bowed the

knee to Baal, and the hope of Israel was more in that unnamed 7000 than even in their immortal prophet.

Then I would say that Christian people are not to be terrified by alarmists' statistics. I should revise the well-known aphorism that figures do not lie, by adding "unless you make them." I once saw a very ingenious table of figures dealing with the increase of insanity in England. It proved to a mathematical certainty that should the then rate of increase be maintained, it would only be a matter of easily measurable time when every man, woman, and child in England would be insane. I

never forget this when I see formidable lists of figures that show conclusively at what an alarming rate church attendance is falling off. The truth is that figures can deal only with material entities and that spiritual forces and our estimate of them lie quite outside the domain of Arabic numerals.

Again, reflect that the church is not the only institution that has the appearance of being always at a crisis. Indeed, everything that is living and growing has a way of continually facing great crises; from birth to death we are constantly encountering such crises ourselves.

It is only after a person is dead that the crises of his life are over.

Look, for instance, at that other venerable institution, the State. Are conditions always satisfactory there? Has there ever been a State where the government was so good, the laws so just, and the conditions of life so ideal, that nothing more was left to be desired? On the contrary, have we not had from the days of Plato, and even unto the days of Bernard Shaw, dreamers of perfect world-states, and rebels against stupid and foolish systems of government? At this very hour is not one of the greatest issues of the European war, that

of Democratic right of government *vs.* the "Divine right of Kings"?

Everybody admits that the most important questions of humanity pertaining to human happiness and welfare on this planet are those relating to government. What sacrifices have been made to disrupt tyrannies and establish just and free governments! The Magna Charta, the Declaration of Independence, and like documents are the memorials of past struggles to achieve the glorious boon of human liberty. All agree that such liberty is a priceless good, yet is there no indifference on the part of those who enjoy such liberty?

We have just had a presidential election, an event which takes place only once in four years. Every effort was made by all parties thirsting for power to get out the vote; yet, even after the most strenuous agitation, one fourth of the voters did not take the trouble to go to the polls to exercise that right for which millions have suffered and died, and for which they are suffering and dying today.

With all the charges against Christian people concerning religious indifference, there are more people in the United States who attend religious services every Sunday than

the whole voting population of the country.

There is still a more ancient institution than the State; namely, the home. How are conditions here? Are they reassuring, or is this most ancient and blessed of all human institutions doomed to die from off the earth? Everybody knows that home life to-day is not what it was a generation ago. The causes which account for this are many and complex. The influx of vast foreign populations, the marvelous industrial developments, the rapid accumulation of wealth, the removal of populations from rural districts to the

cities,—these have all had a decided influence on the changed home life. Recently an investigating society reported that drunkenness and immorality were more prevalent among married men than among single men, the cause assigned being discontent and unhappiness in the home. Who to-day can view our alarming divorce statistics and not tremble for the future of the American home?

Look, too, at society to-day; its very foundations seem to be giving way. Law and order are widely held in contempt; and if we are to rely upon figures, crime is rapidly on the increase. Any civilized com-

munity will probably always be able to keep serious crime well in check, but there are other dangers dark and menacing: the dangers that are every day becoming more acute, dangers of open war and revolution, due to the deep-seated enmity existing between two powerfully organized forces—capital and labor. Already we have reached the stage of bloodshed in industrial disputes, and we are warned in certain quarters that it is only another step to armed encounter, an event which, if it should come to pass in America to-day, would surpass the horrors of the French Revolution. This, of course, is an

extreme and, as I think, a quite unwarranted view of our social conditions, but there is sufficient truth in it to convince any observer that society, too, is at the cross-roads.

But do these considerations help the church out of her difficulties? Do they not rather increase them? If the church is really on the down-grade, it is surely poor comfort to reflect that she is not alone in her misery, but has with her all other human institutions. This would be a valid objection if it were granted that the church and the State, the home and society, actually are on the down-grade, a premise which surely

not even the most extravagant pessimist can claim.

The considerations stated are advanced rather to show that just as the great and abiding human institutions have their crises, are faced by dangers and beset by difficulties which they must not evade but overcome, so too the church is similarly beset, and must not, through weakness or panic or cowardice, sit bemoaning her evil days, but take firm and resolute steps to change them. We must try to understand the real causes that account for the religious indifference of our time, and wherever such causes can be removed, it must be done;

where they cannot, then we must find effective means of counteracting them.

I am convinced that the chief cause of religious indifference is to be found deep in human nature itself. There is an inborn laziness in man which accounts largely for his attitude toward the nation, the home, the church, and society in general. Wherever duties are optional and not compulsory you are sure to meet with widespread indifference; of course, in an ethical sense duties can never be optional. How many people, for instance, would pay taxes voluntarily? Do we not all receive our

tax notices and pay the bill with a sort of mental protest? We pay the bill because we *must* do so. If street paving, building of schools, colleges, hospitals, etc., were dependent upon the rates which public-spirited citizens freely contributed, the city would fare very badly indeed. Now religious duties are all of the voluntary kind. Not even the mildest sort of compulsion can be applied, yet millions upon millions of people go to church regularly, and tens of millions of dollars pour into the church treasury unceasingly: whole armies of teachers and Sabbath School workers give a large part of

their time to church work without remuneration of any material kind. There is no human interest apart from religion that could command the response which the church is everywhere receiving to-day.

Then, too, we must abandon the superficial but widely accepted method of trying to estimate spiritual results by statistics. The greatest of all religious teachers said, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth." We ought to inquire not merely how many persons have joined the church, and how many dollars have been raised, but, is there

a more Christian spirit abroad? is the leaven of Christianity really at work? are men making more diligent and intelligent inquiry about religious truth? Above all, are they becoming more humane and merciful and Christ-like in their spirit? On the whole, is this a better world to live in than it was a thousand or a hundred years ago?

An English paper quotes the Bishop of London as saying that a hundred years ago London was more godly than it is to-day. The paper answers the Bishop in this way:

"Those general charges are not to be proved or disproved by isolated

instances, but a few typical incidents quoted from the 'Observer' of a century ago, to show the level of morals and taste at the time which Dr. Ingram thinks ethically superior to to-day:

"'*Good Old Times!* Private of Sussex Regiment . received 550 lashes in the public park, Nottingham.

" 'Wife, the mother of eleven children, offered for sale at Cirencester with a halter round her neck, and sold for two shillings.

" 'Sentence of death for stealing a silver watch (Northamptonshire Assizes).

" 'Inmate of Bedlam chained to his bed for 13 years, though he had long lucid intervals. (Statement in Parliament.)

" 'Total number of non-resident clergy, 6311; number of resident clergy, 4490. (Parliamentary return.)

" 'Shiploads of women convicts dispatched to New South Wales.

" 'A great main of cocks fought at Henfield between the Gentlemen of Sussex and the Gentlemen of Kent for 20 pounds a match and 500 pounds the odd.

" 'One-eighth of the population in receipt of poor-law relief.

"'Chimney sweeper's boy suffocated through coming down the wrong chimney.

"'Four men exhibited in the pillory and plentifully pelted with garbage, rotten eggs, etc.

"'At a bear-baiting in Essex the animal did not provide enough sport; whereupon the infuriated crowd broke into the ring and cut off its four paws.'

"The inference from these details is not materially modified by the circumstances (announced in the Court Circular for 1815) that the Prince Regent had at that time 103 chap-

lains. It must be remembered too that the newspapers of those days did not take account of such commonplaces as the employment of workhouse children in mines, or the destitution of whole communities (till they broke out into rioting).'" [1]

I have recently been reading a history of Newark, New Jersey, in which I discovered two matters of historic record as follows:

"Colonel Ogden saved his wheat on Sunday, was censured by the Presbyterian Church, and as a result

[1] "Public Opinion" (London, October 13, 1916).

Trinity Episcopal Church was founded."

On the same page you read, under date of March, 1775:

"Newark Academy was founded; at a regular meeting of the committee of the Academy, December, 1794, it was resolved that the Rev. Mr. Ogden be empowered to sell the negro man 'James', given by Mr. Watts as a donation to the Academy, for as much money as he will sell for."

It was an unpardonable sin for Colonel Ogden to save his wheat on Sunday; it was a commendable benevolence for the Rev. Mr. Ogden

to sell the negro man James "for as much money as he will sell for." All the hideous cruelty and unspeakable inhumanity of capturing the poor slaves in their own native Africa; all the heart-breaking sorrows of children and parents being torn asunder; all this stirs no feeling of revolt in the heart of that kindly Puritan clergyman when putting the man "James" under the auctioneer's hammer!

Facts like these could be produced indefinitely to show that life is becoming more Christian in spirit, that this is a better and a more humane world in which to live, and that with

all its failures, Christianity is winning out, the leaven is quietly, secretly, silently, but mightily making itself felt in every nation under heaven. In the most unexpected quarters the benign influence is manifesting itself.

At the outbreak of the European war many timid souls thought that the final proof of the bankruptcy of Christianity was at hand, whereas, everybody knows to-day that even the warring world is looking towards Christ and the ideals for which He lived and died, as the one hope of humanity.

There is a changed religious note

apparent in the works of such well-known Englishmen as Mr. H. G. Wells, and even Mr. Bernard Shaw, while Mr. Bottomly, the editor of *John Bull,* has renounced his well-known agnosticism and professed faith in God. The war is not yet over, but already there is talk of peace from many quarters. It is significant that all such talk is to the effect that ideas of conquest and revenge and merely national ambition must be wholly abjured; and that permanent peace, the rights of the weak and the common good of all, must be determining factors.

So, even out of the awful welter of

war, the Christian way of looking at things comes more to the front than ever before in the history of the world.

## III

SUPPOSE it be granted that Christianity is not deteriorating, that on the whole it is winning out, that though there may be loss in some directions—for instance, in church attendance—there are immense compensating gains in others; that there is more of the spirit of Christ manifest in human society; that men are more inclined to works of unselfishness and benevolence and mercy; that they are more open to considerations of social justice and fair play. Admitting all these, accepting them at

their face value as hopeful signs of the times, is the religion of Christ winning out in individual and particular cases? Is it a great redeeming force in the hearts of men and women considered as separate individuals and not merely in mass? Is there a divine power that lifts the drunkard from the gutter and reclaims the harlot from the street? Is there a power which restrains men from sin and enables them to overcome temptation? Is there a source of inward, spiritual strength to which any earnest soul may resort and find the help and courage that he needs for life?

No questions could possibly be more vital than these. If Christianity is failing here, it is failing everywhere; if it is winning here, then it has the assurance of complete success. Psychology is, as yet, too uncertain a science to enable us to estimate with precision just what are the spiritual forces which enter into the making of Christian character, yet some of these are so evident that they can not be mistaken.

We turn to our New Testaments and find certain great and arresting words; such, for instance, as "salvation." What does this word mean? What are the spiritual forces that

enter into its process and produce its results? Words have a way of wearing out and so are constantly in need of a re-interpretation. The popular conception of "salvation" is the sort of shrewd "safety first" idea of the man on the street; he immediately thinks of escape from future punishment, of making sure of his own safety, whatever may become of others. He has the notion that religion can in some mysterious way afford the guarantee of a safe passport through this uncertain life and a triumphant entrance to the Celestial City, where, henceforth and forever, he will be out of the reach of

danger. Is this the New Testament view?

Take a concrete case, such as that of Zacchæus the publican. You recall the story in the nineteenth chapter of Luke. "This day is salvation come to this house," said Jesus, "for the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost."

In this story a clinic in salvation is taking place before our very eyes. Observe the spiritual forces which are brought into play. First, there is the redeeming force of a great ideal. Zacchæus "sought to see Jesus who He was," and as he saw, the marvelous, moral, and spiritual

revolution began. There was something in the very presence of the Master that rebuked every low and selfish and sinful impulse in the heart of Zacchæus. The forces of evil that wrought so mightily in the rich, greedy, unscrupulous publican were, for the time, suspended, and in their place there was born, in the soul of this lost man, a yearning desire for loving fellowship with the new-found Friend and Teacher; the wish evermore to sit at Jesus' feet and drink in the words of eternal life. This very desire for Christ, this pathetic yearning of a soul for conscious communion with the

Highest, is at once the most persistent and the most powerful of the spiritual forces that make for ultimate victory in the heart of man.

There is everlasting hope for every soul where such desire is. Here, undoubtedly, is one of the great winning forces of religion in the world to-day. It is true that we cannot come into actual, personal contact with Jesus as Zacchæus did. We cannot catch the glance of love and grace and power in the same physical way. Yet we too may seek to see Jesus who He is, and we may see Him in the loftiness and loveli-

ness of His revealed life as truly as Zacchæus did. As we look, salvation may come to us as truly as it did to him.

Then, again, there is the force of an aroused conscience. All the hideous depths of sin are laid bare in a moment of time. There stands a man heartily ashamed of all his past evil life and tired of all the slippery ways of sin. Conscience, that voice of God within the soul, ordinarily a still small voice, is now trumpet-tongued and brings forth such overwhelming accusation that the distressed culprit cries out in agony and shame, "If I have taken anything

from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold."

Any power that will drive a rich, greedy publican to take a stand like that is unquestionably one to be reckoned with. What a restraining influence, too, is conscience. Who of us is there who has not been on the brink of sin, yet held back by the inward voice. Judging from our own cases there must be millions of our fellow-beings restrained from evil and kept in the path of virtue by the inward voice of conscience; or, having sinned, have been driven, like Zacchæus, to penitence and restitution.

Then there is the force of a generous impulse. Zacchæus was not satisfied with making a fourfold restitution for the frauds of which he had been guilty; but now, his soul freed and cleansed, his nature opens wide to the higher and nobler impulses of generosity. He thinks of the poor in the streets of his own city. He had helped to make them poor. For years they had languished in misery and wretchedness, while he lolled in riches and luxury. The sense of duty and responsibility asserts itself and this converted publican is moved powerfully.

Up to this time Zacchæus had been

an object of scorn and contempt. "He has gone to be a guest with a man that is a sinner," the whole crowd jeered when Jesus went down to the house of Zacchæus; but the next day, when Zacchæus went from door to door, paying back all the money which he had dishonestly taken—four times over—it took the sting out of their reproach; and when he went down among the poor and divided with them all of his fortune that he had left, that was evidence enough to convince all the skeptics and scoffers in Jericho, and those of our own time, as well, that the religion of Jesus Christ is a reality in

the lives of men. Now the scoffers understood what He meant when He said, "To-day is salvation come to this house." Now we, too, are ready to see in the light of this incident what the old, well-worn word "salvation" really means. It is not the escape from danger; it is the re-making of a man's inward life so that he is ready to meet whatever danger there may be here or hereafter.

True, the theological terms of repentance and faith, justification and regeneration, are not even mentioned in this entire incident, but who does not see all these forces at work? We do not need to be told that Zacchæus

believed in Christ; we see that he did. We need not be told that he repented; we see the penitent in every act; we do not need to be told that he was regenerated by the Holy Spirit; we see the fruits of regeneration in his life. In a word, we see that true Christianity was at work here in the heart of an individual and that it was beyond all doubt a winning force.

This very force is at work now. Millions of the best people this world knows attribute the strength and victory and joy of their lives to no other power than the spirit of Christ working in their consciences, their wills, their minds. Every

thoughtful Christian knows with perfect assurance that wherever any soul, even the most depraved, will submit to the terms upon which salvation is offered, there the blessed effects will at once appear. This is the one ultimate certainty of the Christian faith, and after all what more is necessary?

If, then, Christianity is a winning force in the world at large, and in every individual case where its terms are met, how is it that its progress is so painfully slow? Why is this such a wicked world? Why are men still debating as to whether the world is growing better? How is it that after

nineteen centuries of Christianity men are still debating as to whether it is true? How can Christianity, at its present ratio of progress, ever hope to win the world?

These are questions which very many earnest souls are asking. Let us face them. In the first place, we must insist that all present-day pessimism as to the progress of humanity in general, and Christianity in particular, is due to the short view of life which most people take. It may quite well be that comparing this generation with the one or two immediately preceding, we can see little moral, intellectual, or religious

progress. Well, what of it? Are we to become alarmed or distressed on that account? Surely not.

Does a sensible mother become distressed because she can not see that her child has grown perceptibly in a week or a month? Let her go away for a year and then see. Now man is a growing child. You must not expect too much; you must remember the long and arduous, aye, even hazardous way of life by which he has come. You must not expect moral miracles in a decade, or in a generation, or even in a century. The truth is, you must take the long view and not the short view of human life

if you would estimate progress truly. Remember that man did not appear on this planet a few thousand years ago, but hundreds of thousands of years ago.

Forget for the time the thin paper pages of history and turn the vast crumbling rock pages of the geologic history of man, and you will be left in no manner of doubt as to his progress. You must sometimes forget about all our puny little yesterdays and fix attention upon the buried and forgotten æons that have been swallowed up in the vast abyss of time. Go back and read the story of men of the old Stone Age; then read that

of the men of the new Stone Age, then of the Bronze Age, then of the earlier and later Iron Ages; and then on and on to the thrilling and glorious climax—the age of steel, and steam, and electricity!

The story of man's moral progress is quite as striking, if you trace it from those far-off days when he was a naked savage, right on to our own time. There is but one impression left—that of progress and improvement all along the difficult path of human life. Surely any person who takes this long view of life would be worse than a pessimist, would be an arrant fool, if he did not see that man

is moving on the upward, and probably unending, path of moral and spiritual good.

Try to think of the Neanderthal and the American man at the same moment, and the whole truth will come like a sudden flash. We are but human; we see life only in its sectional and fragmentary forms. We know in part and therefore prophesy in part, but let us remember that while we see the part, God sees the whole. We see the present; He sees the end from the beginning. "Man's days are as grass, but from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God." With God a thousand years

are but as one day. What then? Are we to resign ourselves to things as they are and await passively the movements of the slowly revolving ages, sustained only by the hope that at some time, infinitely remote, things may be better? Certainly not.

On the contrary, we are to expect sudden tremendous and permanent changes for the better. Time is not our only or our principal hope; indeed, the things of the spirit, like God Himself, are independent of the slow-moving progress of time. There is no sort of mathematical calculation that can estimate the progress of spiritual forces.

Take our own age, for example. Until fifty or sixty years ago, men were traveling by stage-coach and sailing vessels; they communicated with each other by letters that required weeks and months for delivery. They had been traveling and writing in the same old way for five thousand years, and not an improvement in all that time! Then steam was discovered, and afterward electricity with the result that to-day we live an actual, everyday life that would have seemed like the wildest and most fantastic fairy tale to our own grandfathers. In these matters there has actually been more prog-

ress made in the past fifty years than in any preceding five thousand years.

Suppose for one moment that we have reached a climax in mechanical and material advancement, and that for the future the attention of mankind is to be turned in other directions. The institution of free government, the revolution of social conditions, and, above all, the establishment of enduring peace among nations, are some of the objects that would immediately be achieved.

Who is there so blind as not to see that just such events will pave the way for the realization of that kingdom which shall never end!

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